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Viewing cable 07MANAGUA1921, MOMENT OF TRUTH FOR THE PLC

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#07MANAGUA1921**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07MANAGUA1921	2007-08-15 20:41	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 001921

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: MOMENT OF TRUTH FOR THE PLC

REF: MANAGUA 1880

Classified By: Amb. Paul Trivelli, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Nicaragua's Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) stands at a pivotal juncture. An upcoming vote (date TBD) on the issue of Citizens' Councils in the National Assembly will auger whether former President and convicted felon Arnoldo Aleman's power over the party is waning. At stake too are the prospects for a strategic alliance between the liberal parties in Nicaragua. Post believes that Aleman continues to hold sway over PLC fortunes, and if the PLC backs down on the issue of the Citizens' Councils, this fear will be confirmed. We also discount rumors that a new leader will emerge in the PLC to take Aleman's place and worry that none of the mooted PLC challengers has what it takes to be a capable and honest leader. End Summary.

Which PLC Thug do You Prefer?

2. (C) The hottest political question in Nicaragua at the moment is whether the two major liberal parties -- the PLC and Nicaragua's Liberal Alliance (ALN) -- can work together in opposition to thwart President Daniel Ortega's efforts to consolidate his power. The main objective of this strategic alliance would be to win the November 2008 Municipal elections. Most political commentators agree that only a united liberal opposition can defeat the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and claim a majority of the country's mayors' offices.

3. (C) Of course, behind all the talk about opposition liberal cohesion is the big question: just how much control does Arnoldo Aleman continue to exert over the PLC? Eduardo Montealegre and other ALN leaders have made clear to us that they won't work with Aleman or a PLC that is intent on perpetuating the Aleman-Ortega power-sharing and corruption Pacto. "The ALN is founded on opposition to the Pacto," argues ALN Chief Financial Officer and strategist Kitty Monterrey, and ALN's supporters would not countenance an alliance with Aleman.

4. (C) Rumors of leadership challenges and internal splits within the PLC abound, and pundits tout Enrique Quinonez, PLC bancada leader Maximino Rodriguez, and Wilfredo Navarez as the strongest candidates for new PLC leadership. All three have been quick to publicly dismiss these conjectures;

however, in private, Quinonez has gone so far as to ask for U.S. support in developing his own power base. "Don't worry about Aleman," Quinonez told us, "because his power will fade with time." In private conversations with poloffs, Rodriguez and Navarez have been more cautious, but all three evidently are intent on maintaining and improving their positions within the PLC.

Citizens' Councils are Central Issue

15. (C) The coming weeks of legislative maneuvering in the National Assembly will be indicative as to the future direction of the PLC, Aleman's continued sway, and the prospects for a strategic alliance between the PLC and ALN. Especially telling will be the effort underway in the National Assembly to amend the statutory basis for the creation of Citizens' Councils. The Citizens' Councils (CPCs; Consejos del Poder Ciudadano) are widely acknowledged as a tool by which Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo plan to strengthen their personal control over the FSLN and usurp the power of official state institutions at every level of government (septel).

16. (C) Anger over the CPCs has been an internal rallying point for those PLC members who feel that their anti-Sandinista identity has been undermined by the Ortega-Aleman Pacto. PLC mayors in particular have been vocal in their opposition to the CPCs, which they believe will directly threaten their authority and budgets. The July 2007 PLC Party Congress was very clear in its final conclusion document that opposing the CPCs was a central

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objective of the party.

17. (C) Three opposition parties -- the PLC, the ALN and the Movimiento Revolucionario Sandinista (MRS) -- have tabled legislative amendments that would remove from the Ley 290 the enabling language for the CPCs and would clearly define ministerial responsibilities with respect to advisory citizen groups. National Assembly Deputy Carlos Noguera, drafter of the PLC's Ley 290 amendment, explained to us on August 8 that the various amendments would be reconciled by the Assembly's Judicial Committee. He also assured us that, because the PLC and ALN have a majority of the votes on the Committee, the Committee will endorse legislative changes to remove the word "consejos" from the statute book.

Is "El Gordo's" Grip Weakening?

18. (C) Various PLC leaders -- including Rodriguez and Noguera -- have told us in separate meetings over the past few weeks that there was no way that the PLC could back down on the CPC issue. They argue that, when the issue returns to the full Assembly (sometime this fall, unless Pacto legislative shenanigans stop it), no PLC Deputy would dare to anger the PLC political base by siding with the Sandinistas on CPCs. "It would be political suicide," Rodriguez opined.

19. (C) But other PLC leaders are hedging. Both Quinonez and Navarez argue that there is no guarantee as to how Aleman's marionettes will vote. Since, according to Quinonez and Navarez, Aleman can directly pull the strings of 7 or 8 Deputies, the final vote tally may be very close. To many observers, therefore, the CPC issue presents the PLC with a moment of truth, a critical juncture in which the party will show whether Aleman remains the PLC's decisive voice.

110. (C) The CPC issue is also important as a possible lever to promote wider collaboration between the Nicaragua's opposition parties. As recently as August 6, Nicaragua's Liberal Alliance (ALN) party leader Eduardo Montealegre told the Ambassador (reftel) that working with the PLC on stopping the CPCs was the best chance for promoting down-stream

cooperation. Even though Montealegre doubted the sincerity of prominent PLC members' statements in favor of a common legislative agenda, he indicated to us his belief that fighting the CPCs was an issue around which the liberal parties could unite.

Comment

¶11. (C) We agree with those, including Montealegre, who see the CPC issue as an obvious focus for liberal unity. Any PLC backtracking on its stated intention to fight the CPCs will demonstrate that Aleman continues to be firmly in charge of the party and will deal a serious blow to those Nicaraguans who hope to promote a strategic alliance between the ALN and PLC. PLC supporters express a genuine desire to fight the Sandinistas over the CPCs. However, we discount the suggestions that Aleman's grip on the PLC is weakening; he will use all the resources at his disposal to protect his Pacto with the FSLN, even if this means quashing the PLC's rank-and-file wishes on the CPCs. After all, Aleman's strength is not rooted in the party base any longer. His power stems from his control of Supreme Court Judges, Electoral Council Magistrates, the Comptroller General and the Prosecutor General, i.e., an array of government offices that can make the lives of any political opponent miserable indeed. Aleman's grip on these levers is not about to loosen any time soon.

¶12. (C) For this reason, we believe that if there is a vote in the National Assembly on the Ley 290, this vote will prove to be an existential moment for the PLC. If PLC politicians can't break away from Aleman to fight the creation of the CPCs -- new FSLN-controlled bodies that are likely to directly threaten the authority of democratic institutions -- how will they muster the gumption to break with Aleman and forge a strategic alliance with the ALN?

¶13. (C) This Embassy will continue to promote the development of democratic institutions in Nicaragua and encourage the evolution towards a political system devoid of

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corruption. However, we discount rumors over internal PLC splits, and various leader-in-waiting scenarios, as little more than dubious conjecture and chatter from within the political class. Perhaps even more distressing is the fact that, even if Aleman's power is waning, we see few promising candidates for effective and honest leadership in the current crop of PLC hopefuls, who look more like actors from central casting for the Sopranos than future national leaders. End

Comment.

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